



Afghano-Persian Trickster Women Definitions, Liminalities, and Gender

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Afghano-Persian Trickster Women

Definitions, Liminalities, and Gender

I can trace my entry into the exploration of women's tricks in Afghano-Persian folktales (*makr-e zan* in Persian; *qayd un-nisa* in Arabic) to inspiration provided by Karen Merguerian and Afsaneh Najmabadi's discussion (1997), and Najmabadi's (1999) further examination of the Qur'anic story of the Prophet Joseph (Yusuf). Of particular interest was a focus on the guile of his master's wife: her desire, her seductive aggression, and her false rape accusation during his captivity in Egypt. The story in the Qur'an; further inflected in an extensive, derived literature and oral memory; provides scriptural authority for a popular ideology that sustains the stereotype that guile is endemic to the female character.

However, my first direct encounter with this pervasive Islamicate¹ cultural topic of women's guile occurred in 1975, soon after I first arrived in Herat, Afghanistan for field research, courtesy of two very adept Afghan male storytellers who later were the subject of my 1991 book *Rhetorics and Politics in Afghan Traditional Storytelling*.² Tellingly, I queried the term, *makr-e zan*; it was not yet on my radar. I did not know that "women's tricks" is actually a major, pervasive emic topos, even a narrative subgenre, in Muslim popular literature and folklore. As I later heard, women were described proverbially as "seven steps ahead of the Devil" ("Seven Steps"). Reviewing the Afghan Persian-language oral stories that I recorded from the mid-1970s into the 1990s, a solid majority of the tales associate women characters with guile or tricks, forms of indirection and deception—logical enough "weapons of the weak" in a strongly patriarchal social system. This is not to diminish the fact that male folktale

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characters, good and bad, are also regularly equipped with or schooled in strategies of deceit—the weapons of underdog male heroes and their allies as well as villains. The two-man story performance presented in *Rhetorics and Politics* among other things juxtaposes tales of male and female guile. In folktale as a genre, there arises a definitional question: why do some characters receive the label, “trickster” (feminine *makāreh*; masculine and feminine *hileh-gar*; *farib-bāz*³) whereas others who also deploy deceit, do not? Is the existence of these emic categories not enough to put some emic characters or types (especially those who are female), and *makr-e zan* on the world comparative-theory map as tricksters and trickster tales respectively?

Until recently, comparative trickster theory has not provided many tools for thinking about women tricksters. The rise of feminist folkloristics during the 1970s brought forth women-centered folktale collections that reveal how not all women characters in traditionally-sourced folktales are passive or asleep. As Torborg Lundell demonstrates, the underrepresentation of active female characters in comparative folktale scholarship was partly due to structural bias in the tale and motif indexes as organized by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson. Yet the existing theoretical literature on tricksters and tricksterism up to the late 1990s continued to be virtually devoid of considerations of women’s tricks or women tricksters, offering little analysis of women tricksters in what amounts to an emic subgenre in Islamicate literature and folklore.

Intervening in a Limited Conversation

This dearth has been to some extent addressed, if not corrected, in a few recent works. In presenting for discussion three traditional Afghano-Persian tales—one told by a woman and two by men (two of which are assigned international tale types while one is not yet)—I will engage with three scholarly works to examine questions of trickster theory, genre definitions, gender ideologies, and interpretive strategies. My dialogue is with two important world-comparative books about tricksters—Lewis Hyde’s *Trickster Makes This World* and Marilyn Jurich’s *Scheherazade’s Sisters*—and also with Afsaneh Najmabadi’s (1997, 1999) challenging proposal of feminist reading strategies *vis á vis* overtly misogynist “wiles of women” narratives in traditional Middle Eastern literary sources. I will first summarize some reservations about their writings, not to dismiss them, but in order to build connections toward a more robust theory, or at least to reset some questions for further study.

In his brilliant, text-based re-exploration of avowedly male-centered trickster theory, Hyde moves from the Homeric Hymn to Hermes through a number of world mythic trickster figures and then compares them with the lives

and works of the authors and artists Frederick Douglass, Allen Ginsberg, and Robert Mapplethorpe. Early on, Hyde writes:

I have been speaking of trickster as “he” because all the regularly discussed figures are male. There is no shortage of tricky women in this world, of course, or of women in myth fabled for arts of deception, but few of these have the elaborated career of deceit that tricksters have (8).

Hyde offers a seven-page appendix, “Trickster and Gender,” in which he revisits the comparative dearth of female tricksters in world mythology. “Career trickster” is his key term. While it is true that the named trickster figures at the center of trickster myth theory (Raven, Coyote, Eshu, etc.) are not female, there is at least one female “career” trickster in Islamicate tale tradition who can boast a string of exploits under her own name: Dalla (a form of Dalilah).⁴ Even so, from the vantage point of the abundance of explicitly (if generically) labeled women tricksters and tales in Middle Eastern folktales, it seems that the relative dearth of named, female “career” tricksters may point to some conceptual differences between the concepts of archetype and stereotype in western theory.

These categories overlap in that they both assign invariant (or inveterate) qualities or behavior to a class of figure or figures. The term “archetype” derives from Plato’s concept of ideal forms of natural objects, existing in a “divine mind” prior to the contingent existence of their physical realizations, but cognizable by intellect independently of experience.⁵ While Jung’s theory extending the idea of forms underlying cognition is beyond the scope of this paper, it is a useful concept to find commonality among “trickster figures” worldwide and as a category operating at a preconscious, “mythic” level. “Stereotype” derives more mundanely from printing techniques: a stereotype in printing is an unchanged form from which duplicate prints can be made, and by extension, something constantly repeated without change.⁶ Social psychological theory in the twentieth century vastly extended the term’s scope into elaborated theory as an idea applied to specific categories of individuals and ways of doing things, sometimes (but not always) pejoratively, and with varying accuracy and powers of self-fulfillment in predictions of behavior. Each term has considerable definitional power as “goods to think with,” establishing and exercising (as well as critiquing or complicating) categories of experience: “archetype” has more baggage in Jungian psychological theory about deep (unknowable) cognitive structure, while literature since about the 1920s on (social) stereotyping is replete with investigations into the ways people reveal stock concepts in their interactions with “real” people. Applied to trickster figures in narrative, “stereotype” may invite more productive, direct discussion

of how the appearance of type-characters in stories either reflects or affects popular ideology, especially that of gender, to which we will return below. Both categories also have capacities for creative inversion and subversion of normative cultural concepts. Thus, the question of archetypes vs. stereotypes may implicate etically theorized genre: myth vs. folktale correlates with named vs. generic (stereotyped or stock) characters—both of which exemplify guile and deceit.

While certain stock characters in Middle Eastern tales—e.g. the nanny (Milani), which brilliantly recapitulates the qualities and powers of the classical trickster in the person of that liminal female figure—may not have a proper name (few characters in Afghan oral folktales do), they certainly have a consolidated identity as “career” trickster. When they appear as helper and donor figures in stories, nannies (some elderly, some not) inevitably signal the onset of a set of deceptions, stealthy invasions, and evasions of normal social boundaries, especially relating to gender. This suggests a related question: should trickster theory also accommodate virtuoso trickster figures who are not main characters in folktales or other genres, but who are crucial (and, in tales, often female) enablers of heroes, heroines, and villains? Comparative theory does not yet appear to provide for them.

I also wish to question, in light of some Afghano-Persian⁷ oral folktales, Hyde’s argument that insofar as patriarchal (but non-monotheistic) societies are the home of all canonical (male) mythic tricksters (8), the dearth of women tricksters probably has to do with patriarchal preconceptions about male power, and that the few female career tricksters he has identified appear in cultures lacking, or with less firm, male dominance (339–41). In fact, there could be few more firmly patriarchal (and monotheistic) social systems than those in the Muslim Middle East, which does maintain a categorical, characterological definition (from a patriarchal point of view) of women as tricksters, masters of deceit, and (importantly) of social risk. At the same time, genre distinctions must be maintained: Hyde focuses his definitional argument (though not his latter-day examples) on narratives etically deemed “myth” in world comparative mythology. My focus is on folktales regarded as fiction by their tellers, and on sacred legend (prophetology) in the case of the Yusuf/Joseph story. Marilyn Jurich is of some help here: she points out that women tricksters in folktales challenge, compromise, or change the social order while mythic tricksters precipitate changes in the cosmic order. I would add that this distinction holds true for male tricksters in folktales as well.⁸

The viability of my objections depends on the concept of the career trickster, and on genre: what difference does it make (and it may), between mythic and nonmythic genres that the portrayal of the trickster’s mode of action in numerous (and therefore culturally “loud”) tale performances is achieved by

narratives in which different women actors are treated as exemplifying a female stereotype; whereas narratives featuring named male characters (e.g., Navajo Coyote) depict actors who are treated as sacred, extraordinary, and anomalous in that the characters' inveterate tricky nature is not portrayed as a core feature of general male identity?⁹ Does the relative abundance of women tricksters in folktales and their relative absence in texts deemed to be mythic, bespeak a need for trickster theory that is more clearly defined by genre?

Based on my data, I also disagree with Hyde's generalization that female tricksters (e.g., Mrs. Coyote in her rare appearances) lack the insatiable hunger (alimentary and sexual) that is the hallmark of the male trickster. Dalla, the female career trickster discussed by Ulrich Marzolph, certainly exemplifies greed, in that her relentless, virtuoso scams always and only cheat people out of their wealth or special valuable objects (*Relief* 102–04). The old nanny types who collude with villains, and even some who help heroes, are notoriously greedy for reward in return for their strategizing. Afsaneh Najmabadi argues that it is centrally the notion of female sexual insatiability that drives female guile in Muslim popular thought. However, she goes on to argue, what is portrayed in plentiful misogynist literature and folklore as women's abiding weakness, may more accurately be interpreted as revealing male tellers' projections of their own fears and desires; the texts provide a "surplus of meaning" for male and female audiences.¹⁰ This leads her (and us) to consider what draws women to the misogynist trickster stories, as tellers or audience. Her theorizing as an extension of her own reading process of the possible attractions of these stories for women tellers and listeners is intricate. Basically, she argues in part that women can enjoy the acknowledgement of female desire, while bracketing retributive themes through partial readings. Audience response research with Persian-speaking women might be revealing but has not yet been conducted.

Although Najmabadi does not address the wide distribution in Persian oral tradition of female tricksters whose desires and goals are retributive and intended to restore social order and justice (about which more discussion follows), I am concerned here with such female retributive trickery, which I call prosocial. Versions of tale types ATU 882A* ("Suitors at the Spinning Wheel" or "The Entrapped Would-be Seducers Have to Work to Earn Their Food" in Mills 2001 and 2012),¹¹ and El-Shamy 1730 (*Importunate suitor entrapped; chaste wife tricks him into a chest and dares husband to open it*) respectively¹² explicitly corroborate at the level of plot action Najmabadi's observations regarding male projections about female desire. What men *think* women want (men's stereotypical *projection* of licentiousness onto females) can be a core plot engine, both speaking to the experience of women audience members, and also constituting the prosocial woman trickster's actual point of leverage over

male adversaries in these tales. Thus the negative patriarchal stereotype is available for subversive manipulation by women. If I had to generalize, I would say that women tricksters' common desire in Afghan Persian tales is for power, but not always for the purposes of individual self-gratification, or even self-determination. Like male tricksters in folktales, a good number of them are engaged in retributive trickery that restores or reforms social justice in general rather than solely serving their own interests.¹³

This point concerning possible alternative audience effects of men's narrative projections for men and women respectively leads me to reiterate the third difference from Hyde's work that needs to be kept in view: his theoretical and definitional focus is on myth, but with interpretive extensions into autobiography (Douglass) and contemporary arts (Ginsburg, Mapplethorpe). Folktales are a different genre in comparative discussions, though attempts at distinction notoriously leave some fuzzy boundaries, as when internationally identified folktale types turn up as belief narratives in sacred or ritual contexts cross-culturally.¹⁴ Different genres offer to perform different kinds of cultural and imaginative work within culturally specific genre systems, while remaining interdependent. In the Islamicate case, stories regarded as fiction ("Wiles of Women" tales) nonetheless depend on and reinforce a cultural concept (the universal guilefulness of women) that is set forth by scriptural (possibly mythic) authority, as seen in the story of Prophet Yusuf and also in popular interpretations of the story of Eve, the first woman.

Thus, much of my effort in reading Hyde's work focuses on mapping concepts that were powerfully explicated by him for male tricksters in myth onto a different (emic) genre through text examples that I knew, while checking for relevance and noting where concepts needed to be adjusted. These concepts include such basic trickster qualities as mobility, liminality, capacity for disguise or shape-changing, opportunism, moral ambiguity, and paradoxical agency (the effects of his or her action being either explicitly or implicitly unlike what seems intended).

As for Marilyn Jurich, we owe her much gratitude for a remarkably scopic view that assembles narratives of diverse genres from all over the world, illustrating the actions and powers of women tricksters (her term is "Trickstars"), along with a very large bibliography in support of that effort. She starts from Paul Radin's classic description of "The Trickster of Winnebago" as an example of a mythic tradition:

Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows

neither good nor evil, yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being (31).

Jurich frames her application of this mythic definition to women by pointing out that the wives of women are seen as *natural* female characteristics in “society” while the “archetypal woman trickster has been largely ignored Only recently have scholars and critics perceived women as having trickster roles in mythology and folklore [in] a passing comment related to a single action or an expressed trait” (28). Unfortunately, she does not elaborate on the definition of archetype needed to support this distinction. The scope of her review is, for my purposes, too global. In tracing worldwide plot patterns in several genres (but primarily folktales) with tale types and motifs uncited, her discussion effaces local, emic meaning-making, oicotypes and chronotopes (the latter being Mikhail Bakhtin’s term, to be further belabored below) in favor of a generalized picture of human “society.” I am more specifically focused on Islami-cate popular ideology, which is often parallel to her generalizations, but with nuances and modulations of meaning that are related to a specific sociohistorical milieu and to immediate performance circumstances.

Jurich rightly points out the need to break out the diverse and paradoxical qualities of Radin’s mythic trickster figure (Hyde’s “career” trickster) in the diversity of folktale treatments, and also in mythic cycles: “Individual folk types are as various as the traits exhibited in the mythical trickster character” (32). She distinguishes

- The amoral, uncreated buffoon (the mythic version taken as akin to the folktale fool);
- The culture hero/rule breaker/rebel against social custom who is also a master of sexuality (many folktale heroes, male and female), who refuses to comply with social codes, is a truth-teller in face of social refusals of truth;
- Transformers of communities, though not of Earth/Heaven relations.

As mentioned above, Jurich contrasts the trickster of folktale with the mythic trickster: “The influence such a folk hero [male or female in her generic examples] has, does not come from *originating* [emphasis original] a culture but from bringing to light alternative and meaningful values in that culture” (32). She is particularly interested in a critical dimension of female trickster tales that supports, and even celebrates, the idea of female agency. I would add though, that to my ear her overall emphasis (*contra* Najmabadi) does not give sufficient weight to the amoral (or asocial) and antisocial dimensions of folktale tricksters (particularly female tricksters in misogynist portrayals), which

are especially visible in Middle Eastern popular literature. At the same time, though, misogynist portrayals *are* less relentless in my collection of Afghan Persian oral folktales, where numerous prosocial tricksters have paradoxical and apparently iconoclastic energies that may ultimately support normative social values such as patriarchy.

As I have worked with textual examples, it has seemed useful to keep in mind a triple array of possibilities: the female folktale trickster (like her male counterpart) may be

- (a) Playfully amoral
- (b) Truly antisocial (not the same)
- (c) Prosocial in her intentional manipulation of others' desires, social expectations, values and positions

The accomplished woman storyteller Mádar Záher's story "Women's Tricks," examined here, deploys all three types in interactions. Here is a summary of her tale, translated and discussed more fully in Mills 2000.¹⁵

Mádar Záher, *Makr-e Zan* ("Women's Tricks") 1975. (Unknown Tale Type)

- Naïve young prince sent on a wild goose chase by his wife, who asks him to bring her "*makr-e zan*" (a term which he does not understand) from a faraway city bazaar. She wants time with her demon lover.
- Single woman head of household in foreign city takes the prince in hand.
- She brings him in veiled female disguise for "protection" to the king's harem, where...
- He is quickly and secretly recognized as male by the vizier's daughter and seduced by her; then, with her help, escapes in male dress she provides.
- He returns to his hostess per the hostess's instructions.
- Hostess takes him back to court in male dress posing as returned husband of the now "missing woman."
- He is given two brides (the vizier's daughter and a princess) as compensation for royal failure to safeguard the "wife" who has "run off."
- Hostess back at home, explains to prince that he has just experienced *makr-e zan*, and that his wife at home is also deceiving him
- Hostess packs up prince, new wives, and her own household, then travels to prince's home and reveals to the king and queen the deceit of the first wife (who is killed), and then marries the prince as his primary wife. (465–85)

All three women trickster varieties interact in this tale:

- The antisocial type: the deceitful wife who acts only out of lust for a demon lover (who is abusive, by the way). She is destroyed.
- The amoral type: the vizier's daughter, also motivated only by her own desire, but harming no one in the process of fulfilling it. She ends up respectably married to the man of her choice, an avatar of women's romantic self-choice fantasies in Afghanistan, where arranged marriage was still the norm.
- The prosocial trickster: the hostess who acts like a wise elder sister or protector to the innocent young man; sees through, reveals and counteracts the evil of the antisocial first wife. She is a trickster as truth teller who also ends up married to the now less innocent young prince as senior wife, telling her senior in-laws how to maintain social order.¹⁶

Also of interest in reference to this story is another triploid pattern. Focusing on male tricksters, Hyde points out three possible outcomes of trickster tales:

- The trickster is domesticated;
- The trickster is neutralized and destroyed;
- The career trickster goes on to further exploits (220–21)

Clearly, the adulterous wife who tricked her naïve young husband into a fool's errand is the one neutralized and destroyed. One might say that the vizier's daughter is domesticated in a new household as a legitimately married woman in a love marriage of her own making—but perhaps that remains to be seen. Many Afghans, especially parents and elders, distrust worldly love matches, believing that infatuation is a fragile basis for marital loyalty. The heroine, the most virtuosic and polyvalent of the three tricksters, is anomalous as to domesticity and an able subverter of royal (civic) authority/responsibility. In a sense, she is already domestic (if not domesticated) as she appears single and marriageable, but running her own autonomous household. Tradition-minded Afghans would regard such a male-absent situation as socially unstable or suspect. Still, she gives every indication in the conclusion of being ready as a married woman to call out and maintain order in her husband's and in-laws' traditionally-configured, patriarchal establishment, even if she is structurally a daughter-in-law under the authority of husband and in-laws. Though she is not identified as a named, career trickster, further exploits that manipulate established (flawed) authority relations to achieve social justice and good order cannot be ruled out for her.

In this example and in other tales from the region, it is difficult to see the mindless compulsion that Radin describes as a universal characteristic of female tricksters: "He wills nothing consciously" may be more true of certain

mythic tricksters (Radin's focus) than it is of the Afghano-Persian folktale variety, who are a class of male and female schemers who measure (accurately or not) the possible effects of a choice of action. "He [or she] who dupes others and who is always duped himself" fits the antisocial trickster in these tales, whose defeat is achieved by a prosocial trickster with effective counter-trickery, and/or by a prosocial truth-teller who sees through deceit without being deceitful. In Mádar Záher's story, for instance, the hostess/heroine on arrival at the young prince's home, shadows the bad wife when she goes to meet her demon lover by night, accosts her on her way back and cuts off her nose, then reveals the source of her injury to the young prince's parents, who execute the bad wife.

Radin goes on: "He [or she] is constrained to behave ... from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil, yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions ..." This most aptly describes the female trickster of the insatiable appetites, either antisocial or amoral/asocial, but with some intricate interpretation required to trace in text cases her being responsible for both good *and* evil. One could say that this adulterous wife's ploy to lure her young husband away on an impossible quest, perhaps to get rid of him permanently, paradoxically serves to educate him and ensconce him as a householder with three excellent wives.

The stereotypical old women/nannies that are abundant in other tales and who occupy the ancillary tale role of helper and go-between (and sometimes the deceiver or kidnapper of innocent females) for the hero or villain respectively, may provide generic female examples of the moral ambidexterity or indeterminacy of the trickster figure in folktale. The heroine of Mádar Záher's story is even more ambiguous in the context of generic folktale character expectations. She is apparently young but also wise, and at first presents herself as an enabling figure for the young prince. Providing a young hero with a plan and disguise to penetrate the harem is an established part of the nanny's playbook. Mádar Záher, the teller, herself a socially conservative wife and mother, is at pains to maintain ambiguity about the female hero's status and motives, pointedly describing their relationship as chaste until the point when she delivers him back to his parents and they address her as their daughter-in-law. Despite ambidexterity in roles, in any case, neither lack of control nor lack of moral compass characterizes the adversaries of the antisocial trickster: their actions are both calculated and morally purposeful.

There is also a meta-dimension to some trickster tales, both female- and male-centered: among those that can be called asocial or amoral the tricks are purposeful but playful. The purpose is to demonstrate (often on a dare) tricky virtuosity, and retribution does not follow the chaos that is created. I am think-

ing specifically of male master-thief tales and also a group of tales in which three or four women wager with one another to see who can perpetrate the “best trick” on her husband, but no one is punished or thwarted (Mills 1999).

Najmabadi discusses how she as a feminist, and other women as well, can enjoy tales of antisocial women tricksters,¹⁷ even identify with the perpetrators despite the opprobrium cast on them for their desires and their usual defeat (“Reading”). This idea can be applied to trickster tales of both genders, though perhaps with a question as to the nature of that identification: the carnivalesque as critique, a challenge to hierarchies, is one possibility; a simple fantasy timeout from daily virtues that can be safely enjoyed in the tale world is another. Perhaps overt misogyny with its plot consequences sets a higher barrier to identification with, for instance, Yusuf’s female oppressor, but as Merguerian and Najmabadi suggest, fragmentary readings are possible (for both women and men), in which the compromising of social order in pursuit of desire can be relished and the consequences processed separately. As Najmabadi points out, however, different lenses—e.g., class, social power, and privilege—can produce different readings as variants of the motif are deployed in other stories (“Reading,” 218).

Cultural and Gender-Inflected Mobilities and Liminalities

As Bengt Holbek demonstrated at length, adequate interpretation of folktales (in his case, Danish fairy or magic tales) depends not just on the textual integrity of the recordings and derived texts, but also on attention to features of the localities of their performance and, ideally, on the experiences of tellers and listeners, features which have not received detailed documentation until recent years. This is a major problem for world comparative scholarship on trickster tales such as Hyde and Jurich undertake, necessarily dependent on texts vastly different in provenance over time and in quality.

With these issues in mind, but due to space constraints I can present just two more summarized tales for comparison, told by Afghan male master tellers. One, Safdār Tawakkoli, like Mádār Zāher, explicitly placed his tale in the subgenre, entitling it “Makr-e Zan.” (It is a subtype of El-Shamy Type 1730; fuller translation and discussion in Mills 2012.) Abdul Wāhed, the other teller, called his story “A Carpenter” (*Najari*, ATU 882*; Mills 2001) after the husband whose indiscretion causes others to test his prosocial wife, whose protective stratagems then form the body of the tale.

To address Holbek’s observations on the possible significance of social milieu and performance settings: The three performances I discuss in this essay came at two very different moments in recent Afghan history: the two by Mádār Zāher and Abdul Wāhed in the prewar mid-1970s, and Tawakkoli’s in

wartime Afghanistan (1975-76; 1980s).¹⁸ The accomplished (nonliterate and impoverished) village storyteller Abdul Wáhed performed in a mixed gender setting (mixed by virtue of my presence), in the home guest room of my research associate, Aminullah Azhar, in Taw Beryán Village, Herat province. Abdul Wáhed also recorded some parts of his life story as well as a number of other stories for me on other occasions. The other male narrator, Safdár Tawakkoli, recorded his tale, which he entitled “Women’s Tricks,” (El-Shamy 1730; Mills 2012) in Kabul in the 1980s (date uncertain) in an all-male context, for Tajik folklorist Ravshan Rahmoní, who shared with me the recording and his biographical information. I have only Rahmoni’s recording of two stories by him. Tawakkoli was a Shi’a Muslim (a minority in Afghanistan), an accomplished raconteur known for public performance, including radio performances in the period of Soviet occupation.¹⁹

Mádar Záher, the most accomplished woman storyteller I met in the mid-1970s, offered in that peaceful setting the hitherto untyped tale outlined and discussed in the previous section of this essay with regard to trickster typologies. She was my principal woman respondent and good friend, nonliterate but highly interested in poetry, song, and stories; village-born and impoverished as a child and young wife. Her life and gradually improving family situation were well known to me through her extensive recording of personal experience narratives along with her entire tale repertoire at the time. She recorded this story for me in her home, in a relatively new neighborhood in the city of Herat, with her husband and children of both sexes listening.

While three examples hardly delimit a genre or subgenre, still their features can illustrate issues of genre and character definition modulated by teller identity and experience as well as performance situation—issues that are worthy of wider exploration. I will frame generic features I discuss here, such as the trickster’s exceptional mobility, in terms of chronotopes (Bakhtin’s term), the conjoined qualities of space and time that, he argues, characterize particular expressive genres and cognitive states. They are “points in the geography of a community where time and space intersect and fuse.... Chronotopes thus stand as monuments to the community itself, as symbols of it, as forces operating to shape its members’ images of themselves” (84). Bakhtin distinguished, for instance, the chronotope of the novel from that of epic.

To explore in more detail how concepts of the female trickster may operate in Persian-speaking Afghan men’s and women’s traditional fantasy fiction and in their everyday moral reference fields, I distinguish three layers of chronotope applicable to folktale analysis or interpretation, putting Bakhtin’s concept to work in Katharine Young’s narrative discourse topology (1987):

- (a) The chronotope of the general, normative, everyday social milieu (Young’s “conversational realm”);

- (b) Within it that of the “story realm,” the performance setting, the time/space where tale narration is culturally appropriate;
- (c) That of the innermost “tale world,” of the events within the verbally performed text.

Such a three-layered map is useful in that features of the chronotope (and implied social possibilities and constraints) may be quite distinct in each of the three shells or layers. To what extent does telling a tale explicitly entitled “*makr-e zan*” (women’s tricks) depend on, and/or create, expectations in listeners transiting from an everyday give-and-take conversational context, framed by popular gender ideology, through what Dell Hymes called a “breakthrough into performance,” into a discursively defined or nuanced narrative conversational exchange? And to what degree and to what effect does the inner chronotope of the tale world differ from the other two? Among reasons to map in this way is the possibility of recognizing distinct or at least differently nuanced operations of a single stereotype (in this case, “tricky women”) in different but conjoined discursive domains.

Such layered chronotopes cannot be assumed to be stable. One most dramatic feature of configuration of the “outer layer” during the period of these performances was radical change in people’s actual mobility, much of it involuntary. The three performances span the short decade when Afghanistan transformed from a relatively peaceful, predominantly rural prewar condition to a state of intense civil war and massive human displacement. In the immediate prewar decades (1955–1975) new positionings for women arose in domestic and public space in their home communities, due to expanding male labor migration and a partial expansion of public education. Then, with civil war and the socialist government’s attempts at both social protection and top-down social change, came radical, involuntary displacement, a traumatically new alteration in women’s and men’s social spaces, the outer chronotope (Young’s “conversational” layer). This radical change in men’s and women’s mobility in the everyday world provided a potentially new frame of understanding for the characteristic mobility of the trickster in traditional tales.

First Phase Mobility in the Outer Chronotope: Male Labor Migration

The main, culturally significant prewar form of geographic mobility in the 1970s was male-only: that of young and middle aged men engaged in labor migration, seasonally or for longer periods, especially to Iran and the Gulf states, where expanding economies supported day labor wages ten times those of Afghanistan. Women almost universally stayed at home, attended as available by a father or brother, father-in-law or brother-in-law while their

immediately responsible male relatives were abroad. But in more than a few cases, women left at home took on more autonomous roles in household management than they had had in the presence of their now absent male relatives. Anxiety both about the well-being of men abroad, and the behavior of women now less supervised at home, found expression in folktales, daily gossip, anecdotes and songs. Abdul Wáhed's tale, which he entitled "A Carpenter" (despite its centrally concerning the actions of a prosocial woman trickster), highlights insecurities of male labor migration in his 1975 performance of the traditional tale type:

Abdul Wáhed, *Najári*: "A Carpenter" (1975) (ATU 882*) (*Entrapped Suitors Perform Women's Work*)

- A Master Carpenter who is husband of a chaste wife travels for better work, and boasts in new city of the excellence and chastity of his wife at home (rejecting offer of a princess for wife).
- King, Vizier, Vakil (state's attorney) and Qazi (head judge) in turn travel to the carpenter's city to test her chastity with a deceptive story.
- With a false story, in response she entraps each of them in turn in an inner room where they must perform hard, dirty women's work, processing and cleaning cotton.
- King's city comes under siege due to his absence; deducing that the disappearance of the officials is his wife's doing, Carpenter travels home and releases them.
- Carpenter relocates his wife and household to the new city at the king's insistence; the king abdicates in his favor, and he marries a princess.²⁰

This tale at the time of performance easily invoked the historically ordinary but then-intensified anxieties and tests of men whose need to migrate for work could cause them to leave female household members unprotected. Male artisans' migration for work was not new; it is a motif in medieval Persian literature and was by the 1970s a topic of daily discussion due to the differences in economic development and income availability between Afghanistan and its neighbors.

In contrast, Mádar Záher's story (discussed earlier) is more fanciful in its time and less evocative of then-current outer-chronotope anxieties. In particular, her female heroine seems free of the constraints and anxieties characteristic of women left alone. She has abundant financial resources that she controls. When she decides it is time for the young prince to go home with his newly won brides, she commissions a camel caravan with its conductor to transport her own household with all its goods, as well as the other brides. She is very much in charge in this woman-told story.

Second Phase Mobility in the Outer Chronotope: Whole-Community Displacement

A decade later, by the mid-1980s, three million Afghan men, women and children had fled as refugees to Pakistan, and another 1.5 million were in Iran. Even larger numbers (from a total population of perhaps nineteen million) were displaced internally, having taken refuge from war zones in the relatively safer cities. This was one of the largest refugee flows in modern history up to that time. Male combatants who had transported their families to refugee camps or urban housing abroad returned to Afghanistan periodically to fight. Women who found themselves in crowded camps, sometimes in tents for months or years, or in strange urban neighborhoods, lost access to the settled domestic and neighborly social space that Najmabadi describes as “not necessarily a physically segregated space (which would have been affordable to a rather small fraction of the population), but a social space created through female socializing practices.”

Even in urban lower class or peasant households, the common family space became a female space during the day when men were at work or in the fields. It became a male space when they returned and female members withdrew to the kitchen or corners of rooms. More importantly, the female social space extended to neighbors and to alleys, a socializing space occupied by the women of a neighborhood in the daytime. (209)

One substitute venue was the camp or city neighborhood clinic (if available), where women, accompanied by children, would socialize while waiting for medical attention. The time of Safdār Tawakkoli's recorded story performance (approximately 1983 or 1984) was a peak period of warfare in the countryside and also the height of the Soviet occupation of Afghan cities—a time when people feared house searches and surveillance, and told of random, forcible drafting (abduction) of men and boys for military service, even off the streets, all of which Afghans experienced as alienation of their own domestic and moral space, a chronotopic change in the conversational/everyday social sphere. The deep effects of displacement and insecurity on Afghan social norms were (and are) ongoing, and constantly discussed in personal-experience narratives. Women and men complained when I interviewed them in the post-Soviet, pre-Taliban civil war period (1995 and 1996) and even more vociferously in interviews conducted in 2009 and 2012, about the breakdown of trust, “neighborliness,” and social ethics in general during the war years, especially in new neighborhoods. Their vivid personal narratives depicted all kinds of devious, tricky, and self-serving behavior.

However, Safdár's story (summarized below) invokes a prewar age when women could effectively defend their access to socialize in certain home-neighborhood outdoor spaces. A group of women who are observed by a ne'er-do-well, would-be mulla (researching "women's tricks"!) object to his violation of their privacy, threaten him with retaliation by their male relatives, and effectively punish him for his curiosity. Safdár's one reference to changing conditions for women (in a summary comment on "women today!") seems to index the expanded agency of women in the safer cities that the Marxist government then in power was seeking to foster through education and employment despite wartime insecurity.

From Outer to Inner Chronotopic Layers

Actual conditions of mobility and displacement thus radically changed the domain of daily sociability in Afghanistan, especially of women's space, over the decade encompassing these story performances and beyond. Meanwhile, in the inner, tale world chronotope, as Hyde and others have observed for myth, the male trickster is by definition mobile and constantly on the move. His fields of action and risk are liminal spaces, zones of mobility where strange and novel exchanges may be attempted— but not combat zones per se, whereas wartime provides opportunities (and necessities) for deceit amply illustrated by contemporary Afghans' complaint narratives about the breakdown of neighborly trust and former social roles and rules.²¹

While the male trickster is categorically mobile, women's "proper" space in peacetime Afghanistan was culturally understood to be the stable and secure interior of households, not the market place or the road. Najmabadi's description of traditional Iranian women's social space, quoted earlier, well describes pre-war Afghan women's worlds as well (209). How then are we to situate women tricksters' tale worlds relative to the conceptually stationary "women's world" of everyday experience both traditionally and in the twentieth century? Najmabadi casts this portrait of women's social space in the past tense for Iran and for the literature she discusses, but it was still quite accurate for mid-twentieth-century Afghan cities and villages as well. Alleys, neighbors' houses (and adjacent house rooftops) as women's social spaces provided the venues for the first and also "second layer" chronotopes in which social narrative performance (gossip, jokes, certain tales) is common currency. The home living space, jointly inhabited by men, women and children in the evening, was also a narrative performance venue—actually the proper one for folktales, which, if told during daylight work hours (and generally, during summertime), were said by Afghans to cause "confusion" (*sar gardunī*). Women could be criticized for spending too much time out and about in neighbors' houses, the alley or

neighborhood, as in a story of the trickster/fool Mulla Nasruddin: when people criticize his wife for spending too much time “in the houses,” he replies, “That’s not true. I checked, she’s not in my house right now.”

The Narrative Chronotope and Women: Temporal Liminality as Spatial Mobility

This little joke is very much on point regarding the uncertainties felt by men in the daily management of gendered space. It is worth remembering that trickster tales in general, and tales of women tricksters in particular, are predominantly performed in the “key” of humor, yet the laughter provoked can be of the nervous variety, especially when gender relations are being bent.

Najmabadi is particularly clear in describing the ways domestic space ordinarily converts at different hours of the day between male and female space. I argue that these culturally expected fluctuations of time/space provide(d) a chronotopic venue or opening for women tricksters’ liminal powers and activities, both in prewar daily life and in tales. Women in tales show great ability to distract, deceive, and manipulate men who enter female domestic space illegitimately (either by invitation or as unwanted invaders), including those males whose authorized presence should successfully convert the space to that of male dominance. Male peril in female space is well illustrated both by Abdul Wáhed’s tale (summarized previously), and by Safdár Tawakkoli’s traditional tale told in the midst of wartime:

Safdár Tawakkoli, *Makr-e Zan* (“Women’s Tricks”) (1982 +/-) catalogued as motif K1218.1.3.3 in El-Shamy 2004, Type 1730: “*Importunate suitor entrapped; chaste wife tricks him into a chest and dares husband to open it.*” Also related is Marzolph Type *1351B, *Das Vielliebchen Spiel*, including Entrapped Suitor and Husband/Wife Wager)

- Man (would-be mulla) boasts that he is writing a book on women’s tricks (*makr-e zan*).
- He observes and takes notes on a small group of women he does not know who are enjoying a neighborly social moment outside their homes.
- The women notice and object to his attention.
- One woman he is surveilling warns him that his subject matter is dangerous.
- He dismisses her warning but accepts her invitation to her home: her seductive behavior.
- She hides him in a chest when her husband returns for lunch (her plan).

- She tells her husband there is a former lover of hers in the chest.
- Husband, enraged, fails a bet when she offers him the key to the chest and he fails to say, according to their wager, “I remember” (to be said when either of them gives the other any object).
- She distracts her husband from opening the chest, persuading him that the lover-in-the-chest story was a trick, to win their wager (they had wagered for dominance in the home).
- Husband and wife eat lunch together, then he leaves and goes back to work.
- She releases terrified, humiliated (and feces-befouled) would-be clergyman and seducer, requiring he swear to abandon writing/research on women’s tricks.

Najmabadi’s description of space temporally defined as female and male at different times plays out in this tale. In Tawakkoli’s tale, the prosocial trickster heroine lures the would-be mulla (religious authority) and fornicator²² from a semipublic space where she and other women have a provisional right to unmolested social presence, into her own intimate domestic space where women command the space only conditionally, when male authorities are not present. His presence in it is illegitimate, but he thinks he is an authority on women’s behavior and does not see how her control of the space may affect him. Male tricksters’ physical mobility thus is matched by female tricksters’ psychosocial agility in such tales. Women tricksters redefine for themselves and their victims (dupes or other tricksters male or female) what is possible action in what would seem to be a stationary, confined, and defined space. Men enter trickster women’s ostensible spaces of confinement at their peril. Women tricksters counter male mobility by redefining the spaces men think they have entered. This trickster actually does so for both her husband (making him fear infidelity in his own home) and a would-be seducer (and arbiter of women’s nature) by enticing him into her home, leading to his defeat and humiliation. This retributive, prosocial trickster also moves from mere tactics—reactive, improvised moves by an underdog confronted with an ostensibly dominant adversary—to strategy, in which she plans and elaborates action within territory that she controls. She no longer just reacts.²³

Examples are provided by the female tricksters in all three tales under discussion, but the two men’s tales, by Abdul Wáhed and Safdár Tawakkoli, most clearly illustrate the temporal-spatial ambiguities of dominance and subordination in Afghan social context. While responsible men are absent, women are responsible for maintaining moral order in domestic space, but this authority is seen as provisional, and possibly overridden by an invasive (and thus illegitimate) male dominance. The trickster women essentially begin as

defensive tacticians but end as strategists, first seeming to collude with the invasive male against legitimate male patriarchal authority, but then using their own physical control of the familiar domestic space to assume moral authority and to initiate strategic action that the male would-be trickster cannot override, subvert, or evade. This subversion/conversion of authority works both ways: in Tawakkoli's wartime performance, what the woman has wagered for with her husband is authority—dominance in the household.

To invoke classical trickster theory at this point: by commandeering strategy, one might say that this woman becomes a full-fledged trickster in the creative, cosmotactic sense—the one who reshapes the order of her social world by a trick. Najmabadi rightly cautions that such conversions of interior space by women, whether in the enclosed tale world as the audience vicariously experiences it, or in personal actions in the “real” world of gendered everyday domestic space, do not, however, substantially alter the male dominance that prevails in public space (the outermost, this-world chronotope).

One may ask to what extent female (and male) audience members consider the shifting power politics of the domestic chronotope in the tale world to reflect or model shifting politics in the outer chronotopic layer of the everyday. One emphatic comment from Tawakkoli's male audience at the end of his tale, “That's what women are like!”, which was seconded by the storyteller, suggests that some at least did so in the wartime social environment shaped by the Marxist and Soviet-led regime in Kabul (Mills 2012:289). The laughter on the tape has a certain uneasiness. This was a time when the pro-Soviet government was forcing girls and women into literacy classes where they were, in the eyes of many Afghans, in danger of being brainwashed with atheistic, anti-Islamic notions of socialist gender autonomy, and when the absence of young men due to the military draft and their counter-recruitment into resistance forces opened spaces in the universities and also in salaried workplaces for women. Women's more systematically acquiring domestic authority was not just a tale-world fantasy.

All three tales under discussion, then, illustrate the idea of female tricksters' cognitive mobility (redefining stationary spaces) as an equivalent to the male trickster's physical mobility. Not uncommonly, however, women tricksters in tales also achieve mobility in what amounts to public space. Nannies in particular, lower-status, often aged women, routinely move across public space as go-betweens and panderers in tales. Nor was the stereotype of the elderly female mischief-maker absent in the outer (“real world”) chronotope, as I learned from friends in Herat: one elderly, impoverished female friend who had been a visitor and source of stories for my friend, the storyteller Mádar Záher, was forbidden to enter the house by Mádar Záher's husband soon after she was married at age 13, out of his concern that the nanny-like woman

might be bringing messages from male outsiders to his young wife. Mádar Záher sadly told of her banishment in a personal experience narrative.

While folktale nannies may have their counterparts in unfortunate old women in the everyday outer chronotope, women tale heroines acting in male disguise (disguise being a basic form of deceit), assume a more dramatic and imaginative mobility, the full mobility of their male counterparts, riding out on quests and rescue missions. They seem to acquire male martial skills along with male dress, a shape-changing of sorts. Yet another form of female mobility in tales has a closer psychological parallel to real life, the vulnerable moment when the young woman moves from her natal home to what will become her marital home. This vulnerability presages her liminality in the new household, with new authority structures to be negotiated or navigated, those of the husband and in-laws in joint households. In the “real” world the young wife may arrive as a stranger in an arranged marriage, with the task of establishing an identity from a very disadvantaged underdog position. The young tale heroine may also arrive unrecognized, in a disguise, which is only penetrated when the husband she will claim recognizes her. In the latter two cases, the woman warrior and the bride, she is not identified as a *makáreh* (female trickster), though she may have to develop tactics to evade the aggression of adversaries, including prospective in-laws or rivals. She is not a career trickster: the tale ends with her smooth heteronormative integration into marriage.

Yet there are women master tricksters whose entry into marriage does not seem to diminish their capacities for guile. The two women who each entrap would-be seducers in the tales told by Abdul Wáhed and Safdár Tawakkoli are explicit examples; Mádar Záher's heroine is implicitly so. The wife in Tawakkoli's tale is a very ambiguous defender of male and family honor, not averse to high-risk strategies, and the wager she has going with her husband is for which of them is to have the authority in the household. The Carpenter's wife in Wáhed's story is as virtuous as her husband believes her to be, but her strategy for defense of self and home is flawed just as her control of the space is conditional. Described in a period of widespread (and socially concerning) male labor migration, the wife needs the husband's return to resolve her dilemma. Once she incarcerates her adversaries, she has no way to get rid of them, and her husband has to return to develop and execute the exit strategy. It is significant, to my mind, that the chaste wife—whose story this mostly is—is not named in this male teller's title for the story, and in his telling she disappears in the resolution sequence that results in her husband both resuming control of his household and gaining a kingdom and a royal second wife.²⁴

By comparison, the heroine of Mádar Záher's story is a virtuoso trickster of shifting identity as well as physical mobility: a marriageable female head of an apparently prosperous, autonomous urban household (rare to nonexistent in the

real world of Afghanistan of the 1970s and before), functioning like an older sister (almost a mother or nanny figure) to educate the innocent young prince she will eventually marry, deploying him in the high-risk world of female dissimulation. No stranger to mobility, she decides when and how he will return home from his quest: she hires a camel caravan, packs up her entire household with the two new brides, and takes him home. She there confronts outdoors, at night, the first, disloyal wife just returning from a tryst in the wilds with her monster lover, brands her with a cut-off nose and later denounces her to her in-laws. In supplying her prospective husband with two additional elite brides, revealing to his parents his first wife's infidelity, and tasking his father with punishing her (implicitly blaming his parents for not controlling her), this master trickster takes practical and moral authority over the royal household. There is no implied reduction of her powers to explain or to plan, no particular reason to see her demonstrated powers as a master trickster neutralized by this ending. She is obviously a senior wife to be reckoned with.

For women listeners to the story, there is also a third possible focus for fantasy women's roles, in the requited desire and self-determination of the vizier's daughter who immediately sees through the young man's female disguise in the king's harem, devises a pretext to entertain him alone, effortlessly seduces him, helps him get away from the harem (in male dress she provides), and then gets herself married to him without punishment. Polygyny, something Afghan wives in the real world generally deplore and seek to prevent,²⁵ becomes a venue for different kinds of women's self-choice in this story, perhaps serving female and male fantasies simultaneously.

As detailed above, the tale told by Mádar Záher presents all three modes of the trickster: the sexually insatiable and perverse first wife (her demon lover threatens cannibalism), the amorally lustful but cheerfully unpunished vizier's daughter, and the prosocial trickster who restores superficial social order in a heteronormative joint marriage ending, but ambiguously so, in that she has no problem displaying her superior powers of understanding and action over her in-laws who should wield authority over her in the patriarchal system. Like Tawakkoli's heroine, arguably, she has dismantled patriarchy in order to protect it, at least to save its outward manifestations. It seems the pro-patriarchal acts of these trickster women are nothing if not paradoxical in their effect on domestic power distribution. Of course, with regard to the sexual desire question, in Mádar Záher's story the master trickster also gets the young husband, who is described as remarkably good-looking.

The story realm is the narrative performance venue, where women tricksters' exploits, risking social order in pursuit of their desires, can be enjoyed in imagination in various ways, including Najmabadi's "partial readings," by different listeners. The relationships of such fantasies to real-world women's

tactics and strategies are less direct and, I argue, potentially inflected by changing real-world conditions. Other narrative genres, including personal experience narratives, gossip, anecdotes and legend, are replete with tales of devious dealings, and perhaps more available to shape listeners' real-world chronotopes modulated by individual age, gender, class and social status. One narrative topic that has emerged since 9/11 and the (temporary) withdrawal of the Taliban is the deceptions girls and women have used to pursue education, as presented in personal experience narratives reported by journalists after 9/11, in Afghan women's recently published memoirs, and in film (e.g. *Osama*, the story of a young girl disguising as a boy to go to school during the Taliban period).

In this regard, the continuing *stereotypic* identification of women as tricksters serves a licensing purpose. Women I interviewed discussed as necessary, and with a sense of accomplishment, everyday deceptions they and their friends practiced to navigate the insecure social landscape of warfare and its uncertain outcomes. Perhaps trickster theory needs to encompass not just both genders but also, in a more fine-grained consideration of genres, a distinction between archetype as archaic or primordial—perhaps inimitable—and stereotype, which can be seen as having real-world applications that are available for subversion from negative to positive in real people's strategic lives, as when seeking self-determination not only in pursuit of licit or illicit appetites, but also in pursuit of prosocial power. Pertinent examples appear in twentieth and twenty-first-century Afghan women's personal narratives and published memoirs of how they coped with human obstacles to their pursuit of education, or secured the safety of their families amidst the forced mobility of displacement.

The goal of accommodating women tricksters attested in an existing narrative tradition by an expanded general trickster theory has led me into matters of layered and shifting chronotopes among real and fantasy narrative worlds. Likewise, seeking the place of female tricksters in belief and cognition leads to questions of how popular ideology is modulated through genre, from archetypes to stereotypes. This line of thought can only be called unfinished business—a work in progress.

Notes

1. "Islamicate" is a term used to describe aspects of predominantly Muslim culture, social organization, thought or history that need not be directly religious in import.
2. *Rhetorics and Politics in Afghan Traditional Storytelling*, p. 229. Ch. 10, "Women's Tricks," takes its name from *Makr-e Zan*, the title the storyteller gives to the tale he then performs.

3. All these terms related to guile or tricks incorporate Arabic loan words, a pervasive feature of contemporary Persian, more intensely used in literary language. *Makāreh* is purely Arabic, an agentive feminine noun ("tricksteress"). *Hileh* and *farib* are Arabic loan words in Persian, both meaning "deception" or "trick"; *-gar* and *-bāz* are Persian (i.e., Indo-European) agentive suffixes, meaning "having" or "doing" and "playing" respectively. *Qaid un-nisā* is purely Arabic, "wiles of women" or "women's guile," and sounds a bit more literary in Persian, while *makr-e zan* (the equivalent common oral phrase) combines Arabic *makr* "tricks, guile" with Persian *-e zan* "of women."
4. For an example of a popular narrative compilation of her tricks see Marzolph 2017: 102-05: "Dalla the Cheater and Her Adversaries."
5. This description derives from the Oxford English dictionary, "archetype."
6. Paraphrasing Oxford English Dictionary, "stereotype."
7. I.e., tale in Persian language told in present-day Afghanistan, where Persian is one of two official written languages, one of perhaps twenty spoken.
8. And as for myth, what about Eve? Though as Milani (182–183) points out, she is not labeled a trickster in the Qur'an—there, she and Adam are equally blamed for giving in to Satan's temptations. However, she certainly is labeled a trickster in popular Muslim thought. In Persian, a woman seen to act deviously may proverbially be called a "true daughter of Eve." Though not a "career trickster" in Hyde's terms, Eve's acting on her desire is mythically significant, cosmotactic in its effects, changing the terms of human life for all.
9. It should be mentioned that there is also a generic category of male trickster in Afghano-Persian folktale as also in Turkish, the *koseh*, antisocial and predatory, who is seen as a suspiciously sparse-bearded adult male (a good beard being a sign of piety, itself sometimes false). His adversary is the young, ragged, disempowered *kal* or bald boy (poor living having cost him his hair). The *kal* as underdog prevails against a *koseh* (or other tricky predator), developing a repertoire of tricky strategies for himself. A third type of stock male trickster is the crooked vizier, the king's main, and bad, advisor.
10. The plot sequence in the Joseph/Yusuf story that Najmabadi takes to be the "core" narrative grounding the Islamic theme of guileful women, the story of failed female sexual aggression/alleged rape/eventual vindication of the wronged male and punishment of the woman, is comparatively speaking but one motif (K2111 to be exact). Its place in the various versions of Yusuf's story, in the Qur'an and elsewhere, can be argued to be part of a larger meditation on the failings of men and women: Yusuf's brothers' jealousy, their deceitful sale of their brother, and lying to their father being the initial sources of his vulnerability.
11. See Marzolph 2017: 53–55, with bibliography, for notes on this tale in its Middle Eastern popular literary distribution.
12. ATU is the Aarne-Thompson-Uther tale type index; El-Shamy is Hasan M. El-Shamy, *Types of the Folktale in the Arab World: A Demographically Oriented Tale Type Index*.
13. Hyde (22) corroborates this bilateral dynamic in the male version: "Trickster's intelligence springs from appetite always: it simultaneously seeks to satiate [its own] hunger and to subvert all hunger not its own." M. Mills 1991 (Ch. 13, "Black and White,"), 2001 and 2012 present examples told by men, of women tricksters acting to thwart aggressive male sexual hunger, to protect their own and

their husband's honor and the integrity of the conjugal bond. Mādar Zāher in her tale entitled "Women's Tricks," discussed below, portrays a sexually insatiable woman exposed and destroyed by a prosocial woman trickster who in the process exploits both other females' desire and the sexual attractiveness of a young hero.

14. Two examples are explored in Mills 1982 and 1995.
15. Mādar Zāher's personal history and our relationship are sketched later in the essay.
16. There is also a fourth "spousal unit," the princess who is handed over as a bride together with the vizier's daughter as compensation for the "missing woman." She completes the full Muslim allotment of four wives for the hero, in a male fantasy filling the slot of passive trophy wife from a male point of view. The triptych of "good wives" from a male point of view: the passive "trophy" object, the wife of lustful sexuality, and the wife of wisdom, is cemented by destroying the fourth, rejected alternative: the disloyal, adulterous trickster.
17. Frustratingly, as mentioned, she does not discuss the prosocial female trickster.
18. Space constraints prevent the presentation of full-length translations even of these three, so textual integrity is a potential issue. I have published full translations and lengthier commentaries on these tales elsewhere (Mills 2000, 2001, 2012). I present here information about each of these performers and the performance situations to speak to Holbek's context caveat.
19. He was reported to be alive in Afghanistan in the early 2000's, having survived the Taliban's attacks on the Shi'a population.
20. This tale's international distribution and variation are discussed in Ulrich Marzolph (2017: 52-55) and with further attention to European analogues in Marzolph, *The Orient within Us*, a forthcoming compendium of case studies of individual tales represented in European literature and collectanea which are traceable to earlier versions in the Middle East and Asia.
21. One productive research question beyond the scope of this essay would be to explore the currency of stories about deception and deceivers in wartime personal experience, gossip and legend, vs. traditional trickster folktales, while the currency of all traditional tales is now dramatically affected by expanding new media: film, television (new to Afghanistan in 1978), cell phones, the Internet etc. and by pervasive displacement that alters social settings including those of the first and second layers of the chronotope. Neither Hyde nor Jurich deployed data to support a systematic discussion of diachronic aspects of performance and reception of the narrative genres of deceit, though Hyde provocatively carried his discussion into contemporary photography (Mapplethorpe), poetry (Ginsburg) and memoir (Douglass).
22. In Afghan thought, female infidelity is a trick perpetrated either by the seducer or by the woman upon the husband, who rightfully controls her sexuality.
23. I borrow this distinction of strategy vs. tactics in regard to control of (here gendered) space from de Certeau. However, to do so I may do some violence to the historical core of his argument, which refers to social institutions and authority in early modern European social history. For him, strategy as planned action is the prerogative of institutional authorities that command social space. Social order as defined by those institutional powers is thus enforced. Tactics, on the other hand, are those improvised and opportunistic actions by which dominated individuals or groups, who have no authority over space controlled by the authorities, can

- evade, subvert or re-form to their own ends aspects the imposed order. The dominated do not control space, but they use time tactically, and in that mode of improvised action may override or evade the strategic goals of the dominant.
24. In documented versions of ATU 882* from elsewhere (and elsewhere), e.g. William of Cobham's early modern English tale, "The Wright's Chaste Wife," the woman trickster has a much more prominent role in the final resolution and reward.
 25. Exceptions occur when a wife who is infirm or barren agrees to and in some cases even organizes the addition of a cowife to help run the household.

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